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ABSTRACT

The Federal Offenders Rehabilitation Program is designed to test experimentally the centrality of employment in offender rehabilitation. Specifically, does appropriate employment, obtained through the services of vocational rehabilitation counseling, change an offender's pattern of behavior? Does this change occur in the direction of integration into legitimate society? Ten counselors are employed, each to have a caseload of 50. Over three years, approximately 1,500 offenders will be experimental subjects and another 2,500 will be control subjects. In operation only 10 months, the effects of the experiment are not yet available. Of those experimental subjects currently involved it can be said that their Primary handicap seems, to the counselor, to be social. About 10 percent have a physical handicap. About 15 percent desire vocational training. Seventy-five percent are in training or employed. One-half of the employed obtained their own jobs. About 25 percent show evidence of disinterest in the program. Comparable figures are not yet available on control subjects. The experiment ends February 28, 1969. Final data analysis reports will be due August 31, 1969. [Although this reported project was implemented during the 1960's, it should be considered by those currently involved in prison reform efforts.] (Author/CJ)

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AN OVERVIEW
OF
THE FEDERAL OFFENSES REHABILITATION PROGRAM

by
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A B S T R A C T

The Federal Offenders Rehabilitation Program is designed to test experimentally the centrality of employment in offender rehabilitation. Specifically, does appropriate employment, obtained through the services of vocational rehabilitation counseling, change an offender's pattern of behavior? Does this change occur in the direction of integration into legitimate society?

The Vocational Rehabilitation Administration is the funding agency. Also cooperating are the U. S. Bureau of Prisons, the Administrative Office of the U. S. Courts, and the U. S. Board of Parole.

Projects are located in Atlanta, Georgia Tampa, Florida San Antonio, Texas; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Chicago, Springfield, and East St. Louis, Illinois; Denver, Colorado and Seattle, Washington. Subjects come from Probation offices in the designated cities or from Atlanta Penitentiary, McNeil Island Penitentiary or the Federal Correctional Institution at Englewood, Colorado.

Ten counselors are employed, each to have a caseload of fifty. Over three years approximately 1,500 offenders will be experimental subjects and another 2,500 will be control subjects.

In operation only 10 months, the effects of the experiment are not yet available. Of those experimental subjects currently involved it can be said that their primary handicap seems, to the counselor, to be social. About ten percent have a physical handicap. About fifteen percent desire vocational training. Seventy-five percent are in training or employed. One-half of the employed obtained their own jobs. About twenty-five percent show evidence of disinterest in the program. Comparable figures are not yet available on control subjects.

The experiment ends February 28, 1969. Final data analysis reports will be due August 31, 1969.

INTRODUCTION

Clinicians and theorists in the field of corrections have followed several avenues of inquiry as they have sought to understand the causes and to circumvent the continuation of crime. One which has appeared prominently in the area of offender rehabilitation has been vocational training and employment. Examples of the assumed importance of employment and job skills can be found in a number of diverse areas.

Prison administrators realized several decades ago that industry was not only a method for financing the institution and for social control of its population but also a technique of treatment. Parole often is limited by law to those offenders who show evidence of a prospective job on the outside. Probation officers, questioned during the San Francisco Project, frequently used stability and type of employment to confirm their decision on a pre-sentence recommendation.¹ Mertonian sociologists concerned with crime causation have stressed the divergence of institutionalized means and goals, specifically how blocked occupational aspirations may lead a man to seek his goals through socially disapproved means.² Dan Glaser in his mammoth study, The Effectiveness of a Prison and Parole System, found a significant correlation between crime rates and unemployment rates for adults. He concluded that obtaining a job was perhaps the most telling manipulatable factor in decreasing the probability of a return to criminal activities.³

The Federal Offenders Rehabilitation Program has been designed to test experimentally the centrality of employment in offender rehabilitation. Specifically, does appropriate employment, obtained through the services of vocational rehabilitation counseling, change an offender's pattern of behavior? Does this change occur in the direction of integration into legitimate society?

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The program was formally conceived at a meeting in Atlanta in 1963. This meeting was attended by various correctional agencies' personnel including James Bennett, at that time Director of the U. S. Bureau of Prisons. It was also attended by Mary Switzer, Director of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration. The significance of her presence can be best portrayed by a brief explanation of the function of the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration.

VRA began its operation in 1917 as the Federal Board for Vocational Education. Its purpose was to assist the physically handicapped, initially veterans but soon civilians, in training for and obtaining jobs compatible with the limitations imposed by their handicaps. The form of this federal assistance was to be grants-in-aid to state vocational agencies. These state agencies were to perform, and still do perform, the actual client services. In 1943 vocational rehabilitation services were extended to cover the mentally handicapped. In 1963 there appeared to be possibilities for service to the socially handicapped, such as offenders. Besides the possible extensions of services VRA was increasingly committed to research. Miss Switzer, soon after her 1951 appointment as Director of the VRA, had spoken strongly to Congress of the importance of research,⁴ and in 1954 research and demonstration grants had become possible.

It was appropriate, then, that at the Atlanta meetings Miss Switzer was present and that she offered the possible support of VRA funds and personnel in researching the relationship of suitable employment and continued criminal activities. This was the beginning of the Federal Offenders Rehabilitation Program or FOR.

The Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation was asked to assume the responsibility of implementing Miss Switzer's offer. This state had been engaged in efforts to rehabilitate state offenders. Now began the implementation of what would of necessity be collaborative research. Collaborative research designates cooperation between various agencies, in this case, a unique combination of correctional and vocational agencies, of state and federal agencies.

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

Explanation of the nature of collaborative research can evolve from a statement of the phases through which this program passed from the time the Washington State planning grant was approved in 1965.

That a project of this type should be broad enough to provide useful findings was the decision of the initial planners. Inmates at various institutions under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Prisons were to be included. Probationers and parolees under the supervision of the Probation System were to be represented. The latter also would involve the Board of Parole. Several state Divisions of Vocational Rehabilitation would have to be incorporated in the program so that comparisons between kinds of services and between geographic and judicial regions could be made. Consequently VRA, the U. S. Bureau of Prisons, the U. S. Probation System, and the U. S. Parole Board through their respective representatives met and reached an initial agreement as to the relationships of these agencies during the course of this research. It was also necessary for VRA to select the state agencies, other than the State of Washington, which would participate in this project.

Seven state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, representing eight cities, were asked to submit applications for project grants, making them a part of the Federal Offenders Rehabilitation Program. These state agencies cooperated locally with the Federal Probation Office and/or the U. S. Bureau of Prisons. Wherever this cooperative arrangement was made one vocational rehabilitation counselor was to work with that agency's clientele.

The participating states ranged from Georgia to Washington. Georgia was to have two counselors, one in the Atlanta Penitentiary, one in the Atlanta Probation Office. Texas, with one counselor, cooperated with the San Antonio Probation Office. Colorado had one counselor who would divide his time between the Englewood Federal Correctional Institution and the Denver Probation Office. Illinois had two counselors, one in the Chicago Probation Office and the other working in the other two judicial districts of Illinois. Pennsylvania had one counselor in the Pittsburgh Probation Office. Washington had two counselors one at McNeil Island Penitentiary and one at the Seattle Probation Office. North Carolina had one in the Raleigh Probation Office. The North Carolina project could not continue, and Florida in cooperation with the Tampa Probation Office, has filled that spot.

A total of ten counselors would be working in three federal prisons and in nine probation offices. This was expected to represent counseling with 1,500 offenders by the end of the three year grant.

These various counselors were to follow different procedures for starting client service. There were three such procedures, called plans. One plan, in a probation office, was to begin work with clients immediately after they were placed under supervision. Another plan was to begin work with the client while he was in the institution and as he moved out of the institution. The third plan, also in a probation office, began service to clients after they had been under supervision at least sixty days.

The complicated process of arrangements between various federal agencies and various state agencies was completed, the grant request was approved, and the program began November 1, 1965.

OBJECTIVES

The responsibilities, with which the FOR Program was formally charged, were developed by the planning grant committee of Washington State. 5

The specific objectives were:

1. Determine the needs of federal offenders for vocational rehabilitation services according to their physical, mental or social handicaps.
2. Provide intensive vocational rehabilitation services to federal offenders who have been randomly assigned to demonstration groups.
3. Develop measures of success of intensive versus current services in the vocational rehabilitation of federal offenders.
4. Develop related studies and take advantage of research opportunities as they appear in the planning of data collection and data analysis.
5. Study the impact of providing intensive rehabilitation services to offenders on the attitudes and practices of the professional staff in various agencies involved in the correctional process.
6. Develop recommendations for changes in administrative procedures and in public laws relating to correctional and rehabilitation fields.

We are now in the process of implementing these broad and all-encompassing objectives.

The problems of coordinating the efforts of eight state projects and four federal agencies have consumed the initial months of this program. This function of coordination, as well as the one of data analysis, is the responsibility of the Seattle Program Office. All counseling and data collection occur in the local state projects.

STUDY DESIGN

In each local project a list is regularly compiled of people who come under the supervision of either the Probation Office or the institution. From this population a group of eligibles is drawn. To be eligible the offender must be between 16 and 55, not be immediately subject to deportation and be living within a certain area surrounding that particular project. If he is institutionalized his sentence must terminate by February 28, 1968. Only males are eligible, except in the Chicago Probation Office Project where only females are eligible.

From this group of eligibles random assignments are made either into a counseling group or into control groups. As of August 1, there were 369 counseling subjects in the FOR program and there were 590 control subjects.

For control subjects, as in the past, current DVR services will be available to those with physical and mental handicaps. These have and will be obtained through a referral from Probation, etc. Other control subjects will receive the assistance from correctional agencies which offenders currently receive.

The counseling subjects will receive assistance in obtaining suitable employment and other required services. This counseling has been labeled "intensive." "Intensive" refers to two different things: 1) the caseload will be smaller than a normal vocational rehabilitation load; the limit was placed at 50 cases per counselor, and 2) innovation in services may and should occur.

The intent, then, is to compare two groups of individuals who under normal conditions could be expected to follow the same general pattern. But one group will no longer be under normal conditions; the counseling group will have an additional factor, that factor being intensive counseling.

Data are being collected on both control subjects and intensive subjects. Since the program is to determine if employment and vocational counseling help an offender to become integrated into legitimate society, a good number of the data collection instruments focus on questions of alienation from society. These data are collected periodically from the subject over a two year period. As the experimental client receives counseling, a movement away from alienation and towards integration into society is predicted.

As well as information on alienation, data on motivation, occupational aspiration and the realism of this aspiration will also be collected. The usual data on offense type, number of prior offenses, family background, etc. will become a part of the analysis. In fact, a vast amount of survey and overtime data will be accumulated.

DATA PRESENTLY AVAILABLE

At this point the amount of data available for analysis is sparse, but some sense for what may happen in the next three years can be conveyed. There is information available on the 261 experimental clients that were active as of May 1. Unfortunately, until several months from now, statements cannot be made about the control clients.

One of the objectives was to determine the needs of the federal offender for vocational rehabilitation services. With DVR's past emphasis on physical handicaps and the consequent need of the client a much used facility has been medical and allied treatment. Eleven percent of FOR offender clients were receiving some form of medical services as of May 1. "Medical services" is used in a broad sense here and covers regular medical and dental services plus specialized alcoholic and narcotic services. The counselors seem to feel that regular medical needs are less serious for this group than what might be termed psychological or social needs. For this reason two projects, Atlanta and Seattle, have group therapy for clients, and most counselors have utilized psychiatric assistance.

Other than medical or psychological needs a second recurring need has been for assistance to families. This has been in terms of maintaining the family while the client receives training. It has also been in terms of helping family members solve their problems, problems which impinge on the client. For example, one man's wife is receiving psychiatric help. As she deteriorated, so did he. A third need has been for legal assistance of a civil nature. One such case involved a labor union in a dispute over their withdrawal of a client's card.

A second objective was to provide intensive vocational rehabilitation services to offenders. Immediately when vocational rehabilitation services are mentioned, employment comes to mind. As of May 1, fifty-five percent of the 261 offenders were employed at least half of these were working at jobs they had obtained themselves. Nine percent of them were on jobs that the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor considered to be satisfactory, permanent employment. As with many offenders, three-fourths were in that sector of the labor force which included skilled to unskilled labor.

Another common tool of Vocational Rehabilitation has been training as a prelude to employment. Fourteen percent of the experimental clients in May were in training, three-fourths of these were in some form of vocational training, the rest in an academic program. The vocational trainees were either in trade school (three-fifths of them) or engaged in on-the-job training (two-fifths of them). One counselor found that, in order to provide on-the-job training, the most effective way, both for the particular client and the company, was for the counselor to pay the company the man's salary and for the company in turn to pay the man. In both training and employment were seventy percent of the experimental clients.

Another objective was to develop related studies as the need appeared. One possible related study could be concerned with motivation. Motivation has been of tremendous concern to the counselors. They perceived these clients as difficult to involve in the program; thirty-three percent of all the intensive clients were seen as poorly motivated.

Although it is admittedly, for some of these counselors, a new experience to work with individuals who do not necessarily choose to come for service, the difficulties of reaching this clientele can be expanded. There are also those clients who cannot be found or who are already reincarcerated. Ten percent could not be found and ten percent of those who were out of prison had already been reincarcerated on May 1. Adding the reincarcerated, the unlocated, and the poorly motivated groups the clients who actually or potentially will not be served by this program; this uncounseled segment accounted for forty-one percent of the 261 experimental clients.

To return to motivation alone one interesting variation could be found between projects. With clients who were picked up immediately in a Probation Office or institution there was little difference in the stated frequency of motivational problems. With clients who were picked up after sixty days of Probation office supervision, the stated frequency of motivational problems increased significantly.

Another variation could be noted, not between projects but between types of offenders. Parolees were seen as more difficult to motivate than probationers, yet more parolees than probationers were employed or in training.

The various individual projects across the United States varied a great deal around these general statements for the whole, yet perhaps these figures vaguely show what might be reported if a final analysis were due tomorrow instead of three years hence. It is possible to say that there seems to be at present a sizeable group for whom vocational rehabilitation counseling is either inappropriate or unwanted; that just over half are employed, some on jobs they themselves obtained; that social needs are greater than physical ones. Still there is no way of anticipating what actual success there will be with these clients.

CONCLUSION

When the data analysis has been completed and the final words written, the greatest potential of this approach to offender rehabilitation may have been that here was an opportunity to work with the whole man in his community and to work with him in an area that represents a major portion of his daily activity, his job. It will have been an opportunity to assist him without the stigma, in his eyes, of being an authority figure, and yet with the support and cooperation of that very authority figure, whom he occasionally resents, the correctional agent. Who knows?

Three and a half years from now a much clearer definition of the effectiveness of vocational counseling with offenders and of the centrality of employment to offender rehabilitation should be possible.

FOOTNOTES

1. Joseph O. Lohman, Albert Wahl, and Robert M. Carter, "Decision-Making and the Probation Officer - The Pre-sentence Recommendation. Research Report Number Seven, The San Francisco Project, A Study of Federal Probation and Parole, June, 1966.
2. For one example of this approach see Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin, Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs. (Free Press of Glencoe, 1960.)
3. Daniel Glaser, The Effectiveness of a Prison and Parole System. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1964), pp. 358-360, 501-502.
4. C. Esco Obermann, The History of Vocational Rehabilitation in America, (Minneapolis: T. S. Denison and Co., Inc., 1965), p. 300.
5. Credit for the breadth and seriousness of these responsibilities should go to Dr. Clarence Schrag, David Gronewold, Jesse Mincks, Earle Bay, Harold Fish and Frank Noren of the Washington Planning Committee, as well as federal agency representatives like Glenn Petty, Gus Moeller, Loren Helberg, and Richard Grant.